

The Designs of God's Visitations.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

The Right Honourable the
L O R D M A Y O R

AND THE

Court of Aldermen,

AT THE

Cathedral-Church of *S. Paul* ;

On *Wednesday, September 2. 1730.*

BEING THE

Anniversary F A S T for the Dreadful
F I R E of L O N D O N.

By JOHN BANSON, *M. A.* Vicar of *S. Bartholomew the Less*,
and Chaplain to the LORD MAYOR.

L O N D O N: 

Printed by GEORGE JAMES in *Little - Britain.*

MDCCXXX.

BROOKS Mayor. *Martis 8^o. die Septembr' 1730. Annoque
Regni Regis GEORGHII Secundi,
Magna Britannia, &c. Quarto.*

IT is Ordered, That the Thanks of this Court be given to
the Reverend Mr. *Banfon*, for his Sermon preached be-
fore the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of this
City, at the Cathedral Church of *S. Paul*, on *Wednesday*
the Second instant, being the Anniversary Fast for the
dreadful Fire which happened in *London*, in the Year 1666.
and that he be desired to print the same.

JACKSON.



To the Right Honourable
Sir RICHARD BROCAS, Knt.
Lord Mayor of the City of LONDON.

My Lord,

NOT ignorant of the Reception a Performance of this nature may meet withal in this censorious and degenerate Age; to whom could I so properly flee for Protection, as to Your Lordship? whose known Character and high Station may gain it Countenance and Favour with the Candid and Impartial; though not wholly preserve it from the Snarls and Cavils of the Party and Peevish Reader.

However mean and low the Performance in itself may be; yet the Matter, I am sure, is not beneath Your Favour, nor unworthy Your Protection: For if the Honour of God, and the Good of Mankind be (as it ought to be) our first and chiefest Care; then certainly that Method, which is most likely to promote them, is most worthy our Notice and Regard. And though I am sensible You stand not in need of any such Helps as to Yourself; yet as others (if not taught) may be reminded of their Duty by these my Endeavours, though weak and imperfect; I doubt not but 'twill be a sensible Pleasure to You (as it must to every truly generous and Christian Temper) to see others not only possessed

DEDICATION.

possessed of, but practising those Graces, with which You Yourself are so happily and plentifully enrich'd.

Should I enter into that large Field of Merit, of which Your Lordship is truly possessed; my Pen as well as Mind might easily overflow. If an undissembled Piety, strict Justice, undaunted Perseverance in Defence of God and Your Country; If a due Regard to the Interest of Your Fellow-Citizens, though at the Expence of Your own; If to be constant and faithful in the Discharge of an Office of the highest Station and Consequence to the Happiness and Satisfaction of all Parties; If Prudence in Counsels, and Care and Firmness in the Execution of them: If these, I say, are commendable Qualities, they all happily unite in Your Lordship, and have justly rendred You both the Ornament and Darling of Your Fellow-Citizens.

Nothing, My Lord, should have prevailed with me to make this Discourse publick, but the Opportunity it gives me of acknowledging to the World the Obligations I lie under to You, for the many Favours and particular Friendships I have received, and which I shall ever gratefully remember. I am,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most humble,
dutiful and obliged
Chaplain and Servant,

J. BANSON.

ISAIAH ix. 12, 13.

*---His Anger is not turned away,
but his Hand is stretched out still.
For the People turneth not unto
him that smiteth them, neither do
they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

FROM the 8th Verse of this Chapter to the latter End, we find God charging the People of *Israel* with many and crying Sins: As Pride, Hypocrisy, Impenitency, and the like; for which he threatens to visit them with heavy and severe Judgments; that he would set up the Adversaries of *Rezin* against them, and join their Enemies together; the *Syrians* before, and the *Philistines* behind, and they should devour them with open Mouth. Calamities so dreadful (even in the Denunciation) that one might reasonably have concluded, they

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would

would have awakened in them a Sense of their Duty, and caused them to have turned from the Evil of their Doings: But their Hearts were fat, their Ears heavy, their Eyes closed; they would not understand, that they might be converted and healed. Therefore was it, that God resolves to proceed in his Judgments, and to add Weight to their Afflictions; because they *turned not to him that smote them, neither sought they the Lord of Hosts.* From which Words we may gather these two useful Observations, not unapplicable to our present Meeting.

First, the Intention of Providence in visiting and afflicting his People; *viz.* to bring them back to a Sense of their Duty, and to reclaim them from their evil Ways.

Secondly, The Reason why God goes on to punish us, because we do not reform. *Therefore his Hand is stretched out still, because the People turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

First, then, give me leave to lay before you the Intentions of Providence, in visiting his People.

All Temporal Judgments are properly medicinal; and however distasteful or unpleasant they are to human Nature, yet if we are not wanting to ourselves, they can't fail of a wholesome Operation, and of working in us an effectual and perfect Cure. 'Twas on this Account the Royal Prophet reckoned Afflictions among the Blessings of his Life; for *before he was afflicted* Psal. cxix. (as he himself expresses it) *he went astray*; but from thence it was, that he not only *learnt* but kept God's *Statutes*. Thus *Elihu* elegantly describes the happy Consequences of an afflicting Providence. *If they be bound in Fetters, and be holden in Cords of Affliction: Then he sendeth them their Work, and their Transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their Ear to Discipline, and commandeth that they return from Iniquity.* Job xxxvi. And shall we, who call ourselves *Christians*, and boast of a more perfect Knowledge of God and his Laws than others; shall we from Year to Year, and from Day to Day consider him in his Visitatorial Power, commemorate his fearful Judgments, his bitter, though just Dispensations towards us, (as we this Day are more particularly called upon to do) and yet always cast them behind us, and constantly go on to provoke him? Do we imagine God's Arm to be shortened? or conclude we, that those, on

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whom

whom these direful Judgments fell, were Sinners above all others? I fear not; but that if we do not repent, we also shall perish. For God will not depart from the Honour of his Justice, though we may forfeit the Benefit of his Mercy. Whenever God casts us into the Furnace of Affliction, 'tis not from a Want of Pity or Compassion in him, but to call us back to our Duty, and *to purify us unto himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works.* This *Moses* declares to be the chief End of God's severe Dealings with the Children of *Israel*; that he might humble them, and prove them, that their Hearts might not be lifted up, nor they through Prosperity be tempted to forget God. As therefore Misery cometh not forth from the Dust, nor Affliction springeth out of the Ground, but where there is any Evil, it cometh from God; so it is no less evident, that it is our Good he aims at, and that we then best pursue his Intendments, when we break off our Sins by Righteousness. 'Tis for this End that God hath appointed the Rod, and happy are they that hear it. 'Twas this happy and humble Temper, that gave Access to the Prayer of *Josiah*; that respited the severe Sentence denounced against *Ahab*; and which alone will be of Service to ourselves, when under Trouble or Affliction.

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Tit. ii. 14.

2 Chron.
xxxiv.

1 Kings xxi.

God rarely strikes till he has frequently forewarned us : He sometimes threatens, that he may restrain our inbred Corruption, weaken the Power, and abate the Pride of the Old Man : But where these gentle Means prove ineffectual, there 'tis but just and kind that he should vindicate his abused Mercy, and pour out a hotter Portion of his Displeasure upon us. Thus God dealt with *Manasseh* ; he spake to him, and his People, but they would not hear ; wherefore the Lord raised up the Host of the Assyrians, which carried them into Captivity. And when he was bound in Fetters, and was in Affliction, he besought the Lord, as the Text expresses it, and was greatly humbled : From whence we learn God's Designs in his Visitations, and our Duty : That as in all his Dispensations, 'tis our Interest and Good he aims at ; so 'tis our Duty patiently to submit to them, and carefully to improve and become better by them. Every Judgment that befalls us, is an Indication of God's Displeasure against Sin ; and we should look on all Affliction, as a Monitor to warn us of our Doings, and call us back to our Duty. Whilst in Ease and Plenty, free from Trouble and Misfortune, we are apt to be lifted up, and forget God ; ready to conclude, what we enjoy, to be the Reward of our own Merit, the Effect of our own

2 Chron.
xxxiii.

own Forecast and Industry; little considering 'tis God that giveth us Power to get Wealth, that bleſſeth us with Increase, and giveth us all manner of Store; that 'tis he that can ſave, and can deſtroy; that bringeth down, and liſteth up; 'till awaken'd by Change of Fortune, and made ſenſible of the Weakneſs of human Power, and the Folly of depending on any thing ſo uncertain as the Poſſeſſions and Enjoyments of this Life, by the Storms and Tempeſts of adverſe Fortune. 'Tis theſe, as a Candle, ſhew us the Error of our Lives, and make us to poſſeſs the Iniquity of our Days. Thus *Joſeph's* Brethren, when in Trouble in *Egypt*, (though perhaps they had never before one unquiet Thought for their unkind and unjuſt Uſage of their Brother) could cry out; *verily we are guilty, and his Blood is required of us.* The Sting of their Punishment raiſed in them a Senſe of their Sin. So did it likewise in *Adonibezek*, who being vanquiſhed by the *Iſraelites*, ſuffer'd the ſame inhuman Treatment he had offer'd to Threeſcore and Ten Kings. *As I have done, ſaith he, ſo God hath required me.* A Man muſt be deprived not only of all Means of Grace, but even of the Light of Nature, and Uſe of Reaſon; that does not recoil and look back upon himſelf, when under the afflicting Hand of Providence. It naturally diſpoſes

Gen. xlii.

Judges i.

disposes Men to a Seriousness of Mind, and creates in them a fit Frame and Temper for Repentance; it awakens them, by what they endure at present, into Considerations of Futurity: That if Temporal Evils are so grievous and irksome, how insupportable must be the Pangs of Eternal Torments? If we in the Day of God's Grace and Patience are so afflicted, what may we expect in the Day of Vengeance? If these Marks of his Wrath which falls upon Sinners in this Life, fill them with so much Horror and Anguish; how deplorably Wretched must such be, when the full Vials, and the fiercest of God's Anger come to be poured out upon them? Thus we find in the Parable in the Gospel, the Providence of God made Use of Hunger and Want, to bring home the Prodigal; and in him, I fear, is shadowed out the Temper of most of us: That we are ever unwilling to lay hold of Mercy, 'till ready to perish. Which leads me to the

Second Observation, *viz.* the Reason why God goes on to punish us, because we do not reform, &c.

Many are the Declarations of Holy Writ to confirm this Truth. If we view the State of
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the World before the Flood, we shall find God declaring, that his Spirit should not *always strive with Man*; but if there was no Repentance, he would destroy them. To the same Purpose do we find *David* in the Person of God speaking of the Rebellious *Israelites*; who because they hardened their Hearts, tempted and grieved God, and went on to provoke him; *therefore he swore in his Wrath, they should not enter into his Rest*. When Men neglect and refuse the Tenders and Offers of God, fight against his Holy Spirit, and weary him out with their Iniquities, (notwithstanding the many Methods he uses to bring them to himself) when the Measure of their Iniquity is filled up, and they are grown ripe for Vengeance; then it pleases God wholly to withdraw his Grace from them, and seal them up to everlasting Destruction. And though, for Reasons best known to himself, he may suffer them to live; yet 'tis certain, he continues not to them the Assistance of his Spirit. This is evident in the Case of *Pharaoh*; in the beginning of God's Judgments upon him, 'tis said, that *Pharaoh would not hearken unto them*; but as he went on to resist the further Manifestations of God's Power, 'tis said that *God hardened him*, that he might make his Power to be known: Intimating thereby, that in the regular and ordinary Methods

Gen. vi. 3.

Psal. xcvi. 11.

Exod. ix.
and x.

Methods of Providence, God's Grace is withdrawn in proportion to Mens Neglect of it, till they may be utterly deprived of it. To this Purpose is that of *Solomon*, where speaking of the Destruction of hardened Sinners, he first sets forth the Grace of God, ready to assist such as should turn at his Reproof, *That he would pour out his Spirit upon them, and make known to them his Words*; but if they should continue obstinate, and rebelliously *set at nought his Counsels, and would have none of his Reproofs, he would laugh at their Calamity, and mock when their Fear was upon them.* And 'tis but reasonable for us to believe, that if we will not improve the Offers of God's Grace to our own Advantage, we shall experience his Anger and Justice to our eternal Confusion. Every Sin we are guilty of, is an Offence against God, as 'tis a Violation of his Law; but the more we are guilty of, and the longer we continue in them, the more do we provoke God against us; and the less Reason we have to rely on, or hope for his Mercy and Favour; which should be a *Memento* for us, not to trespass too long upon, or abuse the Patience and Forbearance of God; but that we should timely bethink ourselves, and consider those Things that belong to our Peace; We especially, who would be thought to humble ourselves this Day before God; that so our present Meet-

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Prov. i.

ing may not be in vain. Many are the Means which the All-merciful Being hath made use of heretofore, to bring this City or Nation (to which we belong) to himself. Such as Foreign and Intestine Wars, the Pestilence, and that melancholy and dreadful Accident, which occasions our present Coming together; Afflictions, not beyond the Knowledge and Memory of some perhaps present, but I am sure Facts question'd by none: Afflictions, the Sense of which, one would have imagined, might have out-liv'd the Suffering of them. But I fear, should we examine what Fruits they have brought forth in us, we should be as those of *Jerusalem*, who instead of fearing God, or receiving Instructions by his Punishments, have only gone on to provoke him. For a Proof of this, I need not go far back, nor recal to your Minds past Accidents; our own Times, I fear (without the help of a Decypherer) exhibits to us fair and legible Characters of God's Displeasure towards us. What shall we esteem those Factions and Divisions amongst us, insomuch that a Man may almost truly say, *A Man's Foes are they of his own Household; the Father against the Son, the Son against the Father?* but the Effects of that Immorality and Prophaneness, that is not only suffer'd, but rides triumphant among us; the Declension of the Glory of this Church, which was once the Admiration
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and Envy of all the World ; that she is become like *a Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers*, hedged round with the Impudence of Atheism, the Hellish Contrivances of Popery, the Insolence and Turbulency of Presbytery and Faction ; all which flow in upon her, and distress her. Surely it cannot be for any small Matter, that God doth thus visit us ; 'tis, I fear, because we are not sensible of the Evil of our Doings, *nor turn unto him that smiteth us*. Notwithstanding our Poverty at Home, the Decay and Loss of Trade, the fluctuating State of our Affairs Abroad, which are so many Witnesses of God's Displeasure against us ; yet we see Wickedness flowing in upon us like a mighty Deluge. And is this the Way to avert God's Judgments, and to appease the Wrath of the most High ? To live in filthy and abominable Lusts, to prophane the Name of God by horrid Oaths and Imprecations ; to turn the Word of God into a Lye, and the most serious Parts of Religion into Buffoonry ? No surely, this is not turning to God, so as he will be found of us, unless to add still Seven Times more Evil ; and yet these Sins (monstrous and absurd as they are in their own Nature) are become the Fashion of the Times, and looked upon as the Wit and Gallantry of the Age. And shall not God visit for these Things ? Shall not his Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this ? Yes,

he hath, he doth, and will still visit. There can be no surer Prefage of our Ruin, than not to be reformed by the Judgments of God. And to what can this Corruption both of Principles and Practice be owing, but to the Avarice and Ambition of many, the Lukewarmness and Indifferency of others in the Prosecution of their Duty, and the Political Views and Considerations of some, who keep themselves in *Reserve*; and are ready to play any Game that may offer, and determine to make every Thing give way to their worldly Interest? When Men are resolved to be great and opulent, rather than good and vertuous, every thing then must be set aside, which interferes with, or is opposite to their worldly Views; and even Religion itself be taught to speak their own Language, and to be turned into any Shape to serve their Secular Purposes. He is the fittest Person for them, who can conform to their Tempers, who will *prophecy smooth things, that dawbs with untempered Mortar, and calls Evil Good, and Good Evil*; whilst he who cannot thus temporize, but pays a strict Regard to Truth, Honesty and Justice, is sure to fall under their Displeasure.

Neither is the Indifferent or Idle Person less an Enemy to God and Goodness, than the Covetous or Ambitious. If a Negative Goodness be sufficient; that Objurgation of the Lord of the
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the Vineyard, *Why stand ye here idle*, would have been improper. He that stands Neuter, or is indifferent in any Case, wherein the Cause of God, or the Good of his Country calls for his Assistance, not only betrays a great Meanness of Spirit, but becomes a real Enemy. For he (as our Saviour says) *that is not with me, is against me*. And we read that the Inhabitants of *Meroz* were cursed bitterly, *because they came not to the Help of the Lord against the Mighty*: S. John the Baptist, had he said nothing of *Herod's* incestuous Marriage, might have saved his Head; would *Mordecai* have bowed the Knee to that Prime Minister *Haman*, he might have received Favour from him, and the King. To be silent, when God's Glory, or a general Good suffers, is to be Accessory to the Evil that may ensue. The Apostles, who wandered about in Sheepskins, and Goatskins, no doubt, might have met with better Fare, had they been content with this Negative Kind of Goodness; but they were resolved (as it was their Duty) to oppose Vice in all Shapes; and to fulfil not only one Point, but the Whole of the Law, notwithstanding any ill Treatment they might meet withal. Let such then (and too too many such there are) who are of this *Laodicean* Temper remember, when they see Religion lie a bleeding, Holiness of Life become a By-word, the Professors

fors of Christianity reproach'd, and Men, Maintainers of damnable Heresies, favour'd, and the Truth with-held in Unrighteousness: Let such, I say, remember what our Saviour declares of
 Mark viii. 38. *those as shall be ashamed to confess him, and his Words, in a shameful and an adulterous Generation: That of such will he be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father.*

Nor is the Political Professor more to be regarded; such a one shews himself but in Half-Lights, never unveils, but where he is sure of Countenance and Protection; he is ever fix'd on this Point, never to do or say any thing which may blast his Hopes, or prejudice him in the Expectations of his worldly Views. Such a Person makes the best Use of his Religion that he can, *i. e.* he moulds and tempers it so as may best serve his Secular Purposes. What Regard such a one claims, I shall not take upon me to determine.

And under this Head I can't pass by unobserved, that *Negative* Power, so much gloried in by some of boasted Zeal for Liberty and Property: Was this Power lodged in any other Hands than it is, I believe the severe Names of Persecution, Tyranny, Oppression, &c. would be too mild Appellations for it; and however useful in its Institution,

tion, was it to fall into the Hands of crafty, ill-designing, violent Party-Men; I need not mention how fatal it must be in its Consequences. A perfect Stagnation must be in all Business which relishes not with their distemper'd Brains; and all Truths, however seasonable or necessary to be known (had this Principle the full Power they would give it) be buried in Oblivion: An Artifice, which could it prevail in general, there needs not much Foresight to see through it. By this means they might easily impose their own Notions on the World (how bad soever) and without much Difficulty break through the Ties of Society, and overturn the Principles of Religion and Conscience. These are the Evils we have Reason to complain of; these the Difficulties we have to struggle with: But great as they are, I hope in God, there will still be found amongst us, those who have Sagacity enough to detect them, and Courage to defend the Truth; who will resolutely pursue what it is their Duty to maintain; not to be led aside by empty Sounds, nor be beguiled with the Views of Temporal Interest, but remain steady in their Principles, and uniform in their Practices, looking forward to that blessed Recompence of Reward, which far over-balances all Earthly Enjoyments, *viz.* the Love of God and everlasting Life.

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To conclude then, do we believe the Threatnings of God? Know we the Terrors of the Lord? Let us in our respective Stations bravely maintain the Truth, boldly rebuke Vice, and be content (if it be our Lot) patiently to suffer for the Truth's sake; never doing any thing for Fear or Favour, worldly Hopes, or Vain-Glory, unworthy our Christian Profession; and where-ever upon Reflexion we find we have done wrong, let us speedily break off our Sins, and return to our Duty: And then, and not else may we hope that these our solemn Assemblings together may be for our Good, and that God will hear our Prayers, and turn away his Anger from us, that we be not utterly destroy'd. To this end, let us beg of God, that he would make us truly wise, that we may know and consider those things which belong to our Peace, e're they be hid from our Eyes; that we may turn to him that smiteth us, in true Repentance and Reformation of Life. And if we thus mourn, we may expect to be comforted; if we thus fast, to be filled with Grace, Mercy and Favour here, and with everlasting Glory hereafter. Let us then *be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our Labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*